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At the Michigan Environmental Council we believe that the rebuilding of our core urban towns and cities – including the steady progress being made in Detroit's downtown – is accelerated by the physical integrity of its infrastructure and an environment that is free from undue burdens of blight and pollution.

That's why we strongly support the legislation that is the topic of this hearing.

Significant progress has been made in rehabilitating some areas of Detroit. Vitality is back. Jobs are returning. Hope is back.

But the momentum will hit a roadblock if we allow thieves to plunder the physical assets of buildings and public utilities that otherwise would be catalysts for redevelopment. Who wants to rehab a building stripped of copper, relieved of its fixtures and scorched by the fires used to burn the insulation off the copper?

This legislation will reduce the incentive for the plundering of these resources and destruction of buildings that are potential redevelopment opportunities.

The process of burning the insulation off the copper also releases a toxic cloud of ~~very bad stuff~~, lead and dioxin among the most deadly. Detroit's children already struggle with high asthma rates and lead poisoning. Adding to their burden through uncontrolled burning of highly toxic

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materials makes copper theft a crime against children, not just against property owners.

And make no mistake, copper theft is not simply an urban problem. Newspaper police blotters from the Upper Peninsula to the Ohio border report more break-ins and construction site theft of the metal. Rural farmers report their irrigation systems have been disabled by copper-pipe thieves. Air conditioners have been swiped from churches, businesses and homes by unscrupulous profiteers.

As long as copper prices continue to rise, such crimes will continue to be a problem. This legislation won't stop it, but it is a significant step toward blunting the damage.